

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

S E C R E T STATE 034694

EXDIS

FOLL REPEAT STATE 034694 ACTION AQABA INFO ADDIS ABABA CAIRO

ASMARA WHITE HOUSE PASS SAM 86970 BONN 15 FEB 75 QUOTE

S E C R E T STATE 034694

EXDIS TOSEC-290

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, ET

SUBJECT: ELF REPS REQUEST MEETING WITH EMBASSY OFFICIALS

FOR SISCO FROM MULCAHY

REF: CAIRO 1714 (REPEATED TOSEC)

THE PROBLEM:

EMBASSY CAIRO HAS BEEN CONTACTED BY LOCAL REPS OF PLF
FACTION OF ELF ASKING FOR A MEETING WITH RESPONSIBLE USG
OFFICIAL AT 1000 HOURS CAIRO TIME FEB. 15. A DECISION IS
NEEDED ON WHETHER TO ACCEPT ELF REQUEST.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

EFFORTS BY SUDANESE AND OTHERS TO MEDIATE CONTINUING CON-
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FLICT BETWEEN ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT AND ERITREAN INSURGENTS

HAVE SO FAR NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL. BOTH SIDES ARE REITERATING HARD LINES AND ARE REPORTEDLY STRENGTHENING THEIR POSITIONS FOR FURTHER FIGHTING. FOR NUMEROUS REASONS IT IS IN OUR INTERESTS THAT FIGHTING BE STOPPED AND A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT BE ACHIEVED. IT UNLIKELY THAT EPMG CAN WIN THIS DISPUTE PURELY MILITARILY, WITH OR WITHOUT OUR ASSISTANCE.

WE ASSUME EGYPT AND EVENTUALLY PMG, AS WELL AS RIVAL ELF FACTION, WILL BECOME AWARE ANY MEETING BETWEEN USG AND PLF REPS. ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT MAY PROTEST BUT, BECAUSE OF ITS MILITARY DEPENDENCE ON US, IS UNLIKELY TO GO FURTHER.

THROUGHOUT ERITREAN CONFLICT WE HAVE TRIED TO AVOID DIRECT IDENTIFICATION WITH ETHIOPIA'S COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORTS. ELF HAVE IN GENERAL RESPECTED OUR POSITION BY EXEMPTING VULNERABLE AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND PROPERTY FROM ATTACK. WITH RECENT ESCALATION IN FIGHTING, HOWEVER, ELF HAVE WARNED PUBLICLY THAT ANY RESUPPLY EFFORT BY US WOULD BE CONSIDERED A HOSTILE ACT.

PROPOSAL:

THAT WE AUTHORIZE A LOW-RANKING EMBASSY CAIRO OFFICER TO MEET WITH ELF-PLF REPS ON FEB. 15. EMBOFF WOULD LISTEN TO WHAT ELF-PLF REPS HAVE TO SAY, INFORM THEM THAT SUBSTANCE OF CONVERSATION WOULD BE PASSED TO WASHINGTON, AND EXPRESS OUR CONCERN FOR SAFETY OF AMERICANS IN ASMARA.

PROS:

-- MEETING WOULD INDICATE TO ERITREANS OUR CONCERN FOR ACHIEVING SETTLEMENT AND PERHAPS INDIRECTLY ENCOURAGE ELF TO CONTINUE EXEMPTING AMERICANS FROM ATTACK.

-- CONTACT AT THIS TIME COULD PROVE USEFUL IN ESTABLISHING OUR BONA FIDES SHOULD WE SUBSEQUENTLY DECIDE ASSUME FACILITATIVE ROLE.

-- PREVIOUS INDIRECT CONTACTS WE HAVE HAD WITH ELF,
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IN COURSE OF NEGOTIATING RELEASE OF TENNECO HOSTAGES KIDNAPPED IN ETHIOPIA IN 1974, PROVED PRODUCTIVE OVER PERIOD OF TIME.

-- US OFFICIALS ASSIGNED ASMARA SOME TIME AGO CONSIDERED WOLDEAB WOLDEMARIAM ONE OF THE MORE REASONABLE ELF LEADERS/FOUNDERS.

CONS:

-- PMG MAY READ MEETING AS SIGNAL OF OUR LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND IN ITS ABILITY PROSECUTE WAR.

-- ELF REPS MAY DIRECTLY PRESS US TO CEASE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA AND PARTICULARLY ANY EMERGENCY RESUPPLY EFFORT. ANY USG DECISION TO THE CONTRARY WOULD FURTHER ENDANGER AMERICAN LIVES AND WEAKEN THE CONTINGENCY STRATEGIC VALUE OF ERITREA.

-- ELF MAY INTERPRET OUR AGREEMENT TO MEETING AS WILLINGNESS TO ASSUME ACTIVE ROLE AS NEGOTIATOR OF CONFLICT.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT WE AGREE TO MEETING UNDER CONDITIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE, I.E., LOW-RANKING OFFICER WHOSE ROLE WOULD BE LIMITED TO LISTENING EXCEPT FOR EXPRESSION OF CONCERN FOR AMERICANS' SAFETY.

YOU MAY WISH RESPOND DIRECTLY TO CAIRO BY NIACT IMMEDIATE CABLE WITH INFO TO DEPT.

(FYI - AMB. HUMMEL CONCURS.) INGERSOLL UNQTE INGERSOLL
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